



Ethical and Policy Issues in Embryonic Stem Cell Research

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Current Federal Policy

- ❖ Bush Administration -- 9 Aug 2001
 - Permit federal funding for research
 - Only if derived by announcement date
 - 60 lines, then 72, now <20
 - Secy. Thompson: “No limitation on private investment for embryo research” (Aug. 10, 2001; PBS NewsHour)

Policy Environment

- ❖ Federal policy gap in research (funding and oversight)
 - Embryo research: no funding, no rules
 - Cloning: stalled over repro. vs. research distinction
 - Reproductive medicine: little oversight, professional self-regulation, 3rd party payment
 - Bush veto on stem cell bill
- ❖ Stimulus for state policymaking
 - California: \$3b funding
 - South Dakota: no embryo research or cloning
 - Missouri: adopts federal limits

Where Policymakers are Drawing the Line

❖ Source of Cell Lines

- No research permitted
- Existing cell lines
- Excess embryos (IVF clinics)
- Created human embryos
 - In vitro fertilization
 - Somatic cell nuclear transfer (“cloning”)

Policies Shaped by Perspectives on Moral Status of Human Embryos

- ❖ Continuum from “mere tissue” to respect as persons
- ❖ Potential vs. actual persons
- ❖ Excess vs. created (including cloned)—the importance of intention
- ❖ Scientific advances may affect some
 - What if cloned embryos *couldn't* develop past a very early stage?
 - What if cell line could be created from embryo without harm to embryo?

Policy Challenges

- ❖ Embryos destroyed in research
 - Science, politics, religion, advocacy and ethics
- ❖ Existing policies in related areas (permit, restrict, no action; definitions):
 - Human embryo research
 - Human fetal tissue research
 - Reproductive medicine (e.g., embryo use, storage & disposal)
 - Human cloning (reproductive vs. “therapeutic”; civil/criminal)
 - Human subjects research
- ❖ How can policy best enable and respond to rapid scientific advances?

Future Directions

- ❖ Promise of benefits
- ❖ Impact on business interests
 - “Brain drain”
 - Global competitiveness
 - Opportunity for intellectual property revenue
- ❖ Funding brings rules
- ❖ Ethical issues more refined as research moves ahead
 - Voluntary guidelines from scientific and medical organizations
 - National Academy of Sciences
 - International Society for Stem Cell Research
 - American Association of Medical Colleges